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VIEWS AND REVIEWS

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ZEN BUDDHISM FOR THE WEST

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Although I must rely on translations and interpreters for most of my knowledge, I have studied Zen, in the sense of that school of Buddhism known in China as Ch'an and in Japan as Zen, ever since I first read Kaiten Nukariya's *The Religion of the Samurai* in 1920. And when Dr. D. T. Suzuki's first series of *Essays in Zen Buddhism* was published in London in 1927, to be followed soon after by further works on the same subject, my wife and I, who had founded the Buddhist Society in London in 1924, felt that a new world of spiritual awareness had been opened. We received this new and exciting knowledge, together with translations from the Scriptures which followed, not as mere food for scholarship but as a system of personal training which led to direct awareness of 'Non-duality'.

But most of those who join the Zen Class of the Buddhist Society are of Western birth, with the mentality, psychology and cultural background of the West. In these constituents the East and West are very different. Of course there is every type of mind in both areas, but the fundamental attitude, the method of approach to Reality is utterly different. Lily Abegg explored this difference in *The Mind of East Asia*,[2] and compared the straight-line, rational, logical approach of the intellect-dominated West with the older, more varied, more circuitous approach of the East, which uses a wider range of faculties, physical, emotional and intuitive as well as intellectual, to achieve its goal.

Carl Jung invented the comparative term, introvert and extrovert, to describe two complementary types of mind and stressed the profound difference between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the total mind, individual and racial. He further described the intuitive as considerably

[1] Founder and President of the Buddhist Society (London). Among his works are: *What is Buddhism? Concentration and Meditation, Karma and Rebirth*; *Buddhism*; *Zen Buddhism*; *Studies in the Middle Way*; *Walk On!*; *The Way of Action*.

[2] London: Thames and Hudson, 1952.

different from the intellectual type, distinctions which once pointed out, are visible in one's own experience. To this, Dr. Suzuki, to whom the West is primarily indebted for its knowledge of Zen Buddhism, added a shrewd and important comment that the East as a whole is still, in spite of Western influence, content 'to live life as it lives itself.' "They do not wish to turn it into a means of accomplishing something else, which would divert the course of living to quite a different channel."[1]

In other words, in the actual search for Zen (*Prajñā*) the means is itself the end, and scholastic views and conclusions are largely irrelevant. Meanwhile, the English mind today is increasingly moving away from religious ritual and from mysticism in all its forms. It is most unwilling to surrender its purely rational approach to every problem without or within the mind. But the Zen experience is not amenable to logic, reason or scientific measurement, and can never, therefore, be the subject of proof.

These may be platitudes, but they are factors to be carefully considered in the transference of such a subtle commodity as Zen from East to West which, for the purposes of this article, means from Japan to England. A number of Roshis, of both the Soto and Rinzai Schools, have visited London and been the honoured guests of the Buddhist Society. Few had any knowledge of English, and fewer still any real experience of the Western mind in search of Reality. On our part, in spite of a wide knowledge of Zen Buddhism, both in theory and attempted practice, as also of Judo, Kendo and other Japanese 'ways', we found it very difficult to communicate at depth with the mind of our guest. From such meetings, and after correspondence at length with Westerners living in Zen monasteries, we formulated the problem which so far remains unsolved. I wrote a book in an attempt to make it clear to East and Western sympathisers,[2] but at, its simplest it can be stated as follows. The number of students suitable, able and willing to spend years of training in a Zen monastery in Japan is, and always will be, very few; the Rinzai Roshis speaking English who are able and willing to spend long periods in Europe, or even extended regular visits, are fewer still.

What, then are we in the West to do? A Japanese monk with a modicum of training but short of Roshi rank, in the Rinzai sense of the term, will not suffice; and for reasons which need elaboration. For Zen Buddhism as such is no more than a corner of religious history unless its sole and

[1] D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm and Richard DeMartino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.

[2] *Zen Comes West*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1960.

essential purpose is constantly borne in mind. The purpose of Zen training is Zen experience, That is, clear and conscious awareness of 'Non-duality', beyond the reach and range of thought, however pure, however 'scientific'. In Dr. Suzuki's words, in a recent letter to the writer "the real end of the Zen teaching is to open up the *prajñā* eye to the other side (*pāramitā*) of this relative world". All less achievement, even a high degree of scholarship in its Scriptures, forms and traditions, is no substitute. A man of Zen has made a spiritual 'break-through', and matured it, or he has not.

How is such awareness gained? In Japan the answer is simple, by 'sitting', with or without the use of the *kōan* exercise. In the West this physical approach has no appeal. The intelligent Western enquirer wants to know 'what it is all about' to understand what he is trying to do and why, and how. The Zen monk could teach the beginner how to sit, and to meditate on the breath, but he could do no more. He would lack the spiritual authority of the true master of any 'way', and would be unauthorised to use the *kōan* technique or its Soto equivalent, to judge the results attained and advise on the next step on the Way.

For the West is not unknown to these 'moments of no time' which are called *satori*. After all, have not the finest minds in the Yoga schools of India, and the esoteric schools of Tibetan Buddhism attained the same awareness of Prajna? True one such experience is only evidence that the seeker is on the right road to Enlightenment, but of recent years a number of well-balanced, earnest Western men and women have been the subject of experiences which seemed, by classical analogy in many a Zen scripture, to be genuine and of value, and this before they had ever heard of Zen Buddhism. There are many in the West today who by constant striving, in study and meditation, accepting the upsurge from the unconscious which ever follows such, reach a point in consciousness when the veil of illusion is for the moment pierced, and the exhausted seeker suddenly 'sees', in the Zen sense of the term, and finds the experience, while indescribable, quite unforgettable.

True, in the absence of any deliberate study of Buddhist principles, in the absence of right motive for the subsequent use of such experience, and above all in the absence of a qualified teacher to test the mental balance of the would-be beginner and to evaluate his progress, these are far from enough. But would a Japanese monk even of substantial training, have the authority, the awakened spiritual powers to guide such a student through further stages of his development? I think not, nor would the Western practitioner lightly accept the guidance, in inadequate English, of such a

mere fellow seeker from Japan.

Even if this hypothetical monk-teacher were able to find students with the time and ability to 'sit', must the rest, for whom such a beginning is alien to their Western psychology, follow an Eastern pattern of training, however successful in Japan, however hallowed by tradition? Will not the West, because it must, produce in time a Western form of Zen Buddhism, even as Japan received and digested the Ch'an Buddhism of China, and then produced its own?

If so, what can be said of this Western Zen? Very little at present, but signs are beginning to appear. We already have, in 'depth psychology', awareness of the unconscious in relation to the conscious mind. We have our own traditional schools of mysticism, of high order by any standard of comparison. We have a developed intellect which, though its limitations must in the end be utterly transcended, is a most useful tool for achieving its own suicide.

The English mind, not taken at its highest or lowest level, but its middle class, may be described as rational-practical, as distinct from that of Japan which, as I understand Mr. H. Nakamura,[1] is more physical-intuitive. The Englishman wants to understand what he is doing and why; he likes to be told what to do, but he likes to do it in his own way. The English student coming to Zen in the course of a search for 'Reality' may well have already tried other 'ways', such as Yoga, and have read a good deal of Buddhism, together with some modern psychology and comparative religion. He must be received on this basis, and helped along the lines which come naturally to him, for he will not take kindly to anything too blatantly 'foreign'. In my view, this preliminary study should be encouraged and given a definite pattern. He should be well grounded in the basic principles of Theravada Buddhism, which fits in happily with much of the English mind. He should then be introduced to the expanded doctrines of the Mahayana, its higher range of philosophy, its emphasis on *karuṇā*, Compassion, as complementary to *prajñā*, Wisdom, and the all but forgotten mystical element in his mind which Buddhists call 'the Buddha within'. Only then should he be encouraged to study the history, special purpose and method of Zen Buddhism, absorbing as he reads the robust, direct, dynamic approach to life of the early Chinese Masters, with their glorious sense of humour and utter contempt for the processes of thought.

This will bring him to his first and most serious challenge, when he is told to see for himself that whereas thought lies in the field of duality,

[1] *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples.* Honolulu: East-West Center Press.

with its countless 'pairs of opposites', Zen awareness lies beyond the utmost powers of his most cherished attribute, the thinking mind. This step is vital, for the Western student of Zen will invariably begin by trying to 'understand' Zen as a series of new ideas, and the teacher's hardest task is in persuading him to accept otherwise.

In the course of this painful process I strongly advocate that he be taught right motive, the right reason for seeking the Zen experience. The West today is dominated with the lust for power, whether of position or money, which will help the individual to defeat his opponents, in business, politics or social prestige. To this end he will grab and use any tool to hand, including Yoga, meditation or the mysterious powers of Zen. But spiritual power abused is spiritual death. Each and every advantage so obtained must be dedicated to the benefit of all mankind, as distinct from a further blowing up of the falsely-imagined 'ego'-balloon of the personality. Hence the question which I personally put to any applicant for the Zen Class of the Buddhist Society, 'You say you want Zen. Why?'

Next, the student will have to examine the products of his vaunted thought. There will be much to destroy of past wrong thinking and belief, and these should be replaced by deliberate new thinking, digesting Buddhist principles with a view to aiming in the right direction for the experience, beyond all thinking, of Zen awareness. All Englishmen have deep in the subconscious, even if no longer in the conscious mind, belief in some Saviour who will save a man from the consequences of his own wrong action. Each limits incarnation to the ambit of one life. Each thinks he knows that reason can, and, will in the end, solve all the riddles yet unsolved. In place of these the seeker of Zen must abandon reliance on any Scripture, teacher, tradition or other outside 'authority', find and develop his intuition as the faculty of direct perception of Reality, and become aware of the Buddha or 'Essence of Mind' within which will suddenly shine forth when the foolish belief in a permanent self is finally abandoned.

But the Zen Buddhist must go further. All his study is directed to actual experience, and his self-training must be planned accordingly. His reading will now be confined to works which rouse the intuition. Even translations of extracts from the Prajnaparamita literature, such as the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra, as we know them, have this effect, and the same applies to the works we now use daily, of Huang Po, Hui Hai and above all the Sutra of Hui Neng. Very few modern writers produce for us this same effect, and those of Dr. D. T. Suzuki, the late Nyogen Senzaki and Yasutani Roshi stand supreme.

But even the careful study of such works will not suffice. For most of us there must be periods of meditation in circumstances quiet enough to allow the unconscious aspect of the mind to rise and be digested. But its purpose of meditation must be clear. It is, presumably, first to calm the mind and reduce to a minimum the distraction of ideas. The age-long practice of counting the breaths is here of value. Secondly, to absorb and become one with a chosen theme or subject of meditation. In the West the *kōan* practice should not be used in the absence of a Roshi. It is in our view dangerous to arouse such power of mental energy, directed to a blank wall, unless a master is available to assist in its control. And only a master, we understand, is qualified to say when the *kōan* is solved and to set a new one. In the Buddhist Society we use a theme which is nearly a *kōan*, but with just enough meat on the bone, as we say, to rouse the intuition to master it without the risks above described. When to such meditation, practised regularly in Class and daily in the home, is added a working on the theme each idle moment of the day, the results are most encouraging. The intellect is gently but firmly trained to transcend its own limitations, and the practice of perpetual 'mindfulness' is a form of character-training which seems acceptable to the English mind. Idle thought is reduced to a minimum; the will is strengthened to face and drop the illusion of a separate self; compassion grows with increasing awareness of the one inseverable Life-force and its infinite manifestations, and the mind is steadily illumined with the light of the Essence of Mind. As I summarised my views in the Editorial to 'The Middle Way' for February 1966, "As the mind is progressively controlled, the heart expanded with compassion, the clamour of self diminished, and habitual thought uplifted to more spiritual states of awareness, the whole field of the mind is increasingly illumined by Enlightenment, even as the sun breaks through the morning mist and dissolves the night into the cloudless light of day... As the thinking mind is more and more illumined, the faculty of Buddhi, the intuition, is the more developed and aroused to 'see', and when the last screen falls the 'gradual' process of the the mind's enlightenment is crowned with 'sudden' experience".

These observations, made with all humility, are based on thirty years' experience of a Zen Class in London. It may be said that all this is a mere prostitution of the Zen tradition as preserved in Japan. If said, it may be true. But more and more of those who steadily apply such principles are the subject of sudden 'moments' of high awareness, in which the duality of thought is 'suddenly' transcended, seeker and object fused in one, self for

that moment ceases to be, and a radiance of 'foolish' joy illumines all one's being, never to be entirely lost in the days to come.

Whether or not these moments, when carefully distinguished from mere psychic eruptions with which they are easily confused, are comparable with the 'first peep' of *kensho* we know not. But this we know, that by deep study of Zen literature at its finest, application of these truths in meditation and daily life, and the modified form of the *kōan* exercise described above, the mind is calmed, ennobled and raised, to be ready for those moments of more spiritual awareness which make the years of training enormously worth while. We know that such experience is but the beginning of the Zen path. But if we thus enter, shall we not the more easily 'Walk on'?

Is it along these lines that the Ch'an tradition of China and the later Zen tradition of Japan will be rooted in the English mind and find new flowering? At least its life in England is strong enough to be seeking new forms of expression. Is this still true in Japan?

GOTAMA'S EARLY PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTATION

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> Once when the Lord was staying at Savatthi in Jeta's grove . . . he addressed the listening Almsmen as follows: "In the days before my full enlightenment, when I was . . . not yet all-enlightened, the idea came to me to sort out my thoughts into two separate and distinct groups."[2]

Although almost every account of the Buddha's life includes his visible outward experiments in self-torture, even critical scholars have overlooked the evidence in the Pāli texts that the night under the Bo tree was made possible by a long series of prior inward steps in psychological discovery.

[1] The author of *Buddhist and Quaker Experiments with Truth*. Dr. Havens lived for a time at Itto-en near Kyoto, Japan. She received her Ph. D. from Yale University in Buddhist philosophy and is a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

[2] *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, translated from the *Majjhima Nikāya* by Lord Chalmers (London: 1926), hereafter abbreviated as *FDB*, Vol. I, p. 79.